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## New Eczema Cause Found

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## 'Leaky Skin' May Cause Eczema

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Corbis

By Ronnie Koenig

It's red, it's itchy, it's unsightly -- it's called **eczema**, and it's the most common inflammatory skin disease. Those who suffer from the condition know that treatments are mostly limited to anti-inflammatory drugs like [prednisone](#) and topical creams, which can be costly.

The cause of eczema was once pinned on the upper-most layer of the skin known as the stratum corneum -- in sufferers, this skin barrier is leaky, allowing intruders, such as pollen, [dust mites](#), mold and dander -- which can wreak havoc on the immune system. But now a new study, published in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*, has revealed that a second skin barrier structure consisting of cell-to-cell connections, known as tight junctions, is also faulty in eczema patients and may play a role in the development of the disease.

Dr. Lisa Beck, lead study author and associate professor in the Department of Dermatology at the [University of Rochester Medical Center](#) said in a [press release](#): "Our findings challenge the belief that the top layer of the skin or stratum corneum is the sole barrier structure: It suggests that both the stratum corneum and tight junctions need to be defective to jumpstart the disease."

For their study, Beck and her team studied skin samples from healthy patients and patients with eczema. Using resistance and permeability tests, they discovered that tight junctions were strong and tight in healthy skin samples but loose and porous in the skin of eczema patients.

The researchers hope that this new information could lead to treatments that directly address the skin barrier dysfunction (currently there are none). For now, the 17 percent of children and 6 percent of adults who have eczema must cope with creams and ointments that offer only modest benefits.

Dr. Michele S. Green, a New York City [dermatologist](#) says she is not surprised by the revelation that leaky skin contributes to eczema. "People with eczema and [psoriasis](#) are more prone to staph infections, and that's because the epidermis is damaged and microbes can enter more easily," she told AOL Health. She says that the change in seasons can cause an eczema flare-up.

"Eczema is dry skin to the max -- almost 25 percent of my patients come to me because of it."

Green recommends her patients take an over-the-counter anti-histamine such as Zyrtec or Benadryl -- which she says a person can stay on indefinitely -- in combination with Aveeno or even Vaseline applied to the red and irritated areas.

If the eczema is on the face, Green recommends applying a whole milk

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### 'Leaky Skin' May Be Eczema Cause

compress -- a washcloth dipped in milk -- to the face two to three times a day. If it's on the body, she recommends taking an oatmeal bath.

And while Green is hopeful that Beck's research will lead to new developments down the line, she also says that a lot more science has to be done before those treatments become available.

"We treat eczema with anti-inflammatory drugs, but [prednisone](#) is the last resort. First we'll try topical steroids and moisturizers. It sounds silly, but I can't emphasize enough the importance of proper moisturizing. I've seen patients almost completely cured of their eczema after following a consistent routine."

If you have any type of persistent skin problem, be sure to see a dermatologist.

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